

AN EVENING WITH JERRY LEWIS

By Lorraine Viade, Psy.D.



This past weekend, I was fortunate to have a chance to see one of the living legends of comedy in person. As a child, I fell in love with Jerry Lewis as the Nutty Professor. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the movie. If you have never seen it, check it out. It is a comedy classic.

Jerry Lewis has always been a fascinating personality. His combination of comic genius, perfectionistic drive and intensely emotional devotion to helping alleviate the suffering of those afflicted with Muscular Dystrophy have both moved and entertained me for decades. I did not know what to expect from the evening. There is always a risk of being disappointed if the reality does not live up to the fantasy of how you imagine a celebrity to be. Fortunately, Jerry Lewis was everything I hoped he would be at least for the 90 minutes that we, as an audience of fans, spent listening to him share high points in his career.

Weaving stories, jokes, film clips and sentimental musings, Lewis was every bit the King of Comedy. As he spoke of his life and his losses over the years, he was soft, vulnerable and sensitive in the ways only someone approaching their 88th year can be. The clips reminded us of just how his comedy impacted those funny men who we enjoy today. People like Jim Carrey and Martin Short borrowed much from his wacky ways and to hear him describe the great Stan Laurel and Ed Wynn as people he learned from was truly a treat. There will never be another Jerry Lewis. As with most great comedians, Lewis is also an excellent dramatic actor.

His collaborative bromance with Dean Martin was such an important part of his work and his personal life. You could see the deep regret and the love he had for his friend. As he spoke about his other pals who were part of the Rat Pack, he did so with reverence, respect and gratitude. His indebtedness to Frank Sinatra for orchestrating the reconciliation after a 20-year estrangement from his beloved Dean was touching. His clear affection and love for his father and son were evident in his visceral reactions to seeing them both on screen performing *Sonny Boy*, a routine near and dear to the Lewis family.

Jerry Lewis is a comic, father, humanitarian, friend, husband and still part of the modern comedy world. He has a new film, *Max Rose*, coming out. His work lives in the innovative movies he directed and wrote. Thank you, Jerry Lewis for being “somebody” who makes the world a better place.

